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International review of ECE Leadership Research – Finland, Germany, Japan, Singapore, South Africa and the United States under Review

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Abstract

This chapter reviews selected research about leadership in early childhood education (ECE) in Finland, Germany, Japan, Singapore, South Africa, and USA. A short general introduction to ECE in each country is offered, followed by the summary of the research conducted in the country in question. In addition, a comparative synthesis of research is presented in which the methodological choices, broader societal and educational background and the research contributions to understanding leadership in ECE are discussed from international and transnational perspectives. This review concludes that ECE is of growing interest in the countries included in the study and its impact is widely recognised. Furthermore, the review indicates that in Finland and the USA, there has been extensive research on ECE leadership research, while in Germany, Singapore, South Africa and Japan research into ECE leadership has only recently emerged. Despite the differences in the traditions and roots of leadership research, good quality early childhood education is seen as the main objective of the leadership in every country.

German Abstract

Dieses Kapitel gibt einen Überblick über ausgewählte Forschungsergebnisse über die Leitung in der frühen Bildung in Finnland, Deutschland, Japan, Singapur, Südafrika und USA. Zu jedem Land wird eine allgemeine Einführung in die frühe Bildung gegeben, gefolgt von einer Zusammenfassung von einschlägiger Forschung zur Leitung von Kindertageseinrichtungen. Außerdem wird eine vergleichende Synthese der Forschung präsentiert, in der die Wahl der Methoden, der weitere gesellschaft-

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liche und bildungspolitische Hintergrund und die Beiträge zum Verstehen von Leitungsaufgaben in der frühen Bildung in einer internationalen und transnationalen Perspektive diskutiert werden. Das Review kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die frühe Bildung in den betrachteten Ländern von wachsendem Interesse ist und deren Bedeutung erkannt wird. Weiterhin zeigt der Review, dass in Finnland und den USA bereits sehr viel zur Leitung in der frühen Bildung geforscht wurde, während dieses Thema in Deutschland, Südafrika und Japan erst vor kurzem aufgegriffen wurde. Trotz der Unterschiede in der Forschung und den Wurzeln der Leitungsforschung wird eine gute Qualität der frühen Bildung als Hauptziel der Leitung in jedem der beteiligten Länder angestrebt.

Finish Abstract

Kansainvälinen katsaus varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimukseen – Suomi, Saksa, Japani, Singapore, Etelä-Afrikka ja USA tarkastelun kohteena

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimusta Suomessa, Saksassa, Japanissa, Singaporessa, Etelä-Afrikassa ja Yhdysvalloissa. Artikkelin aluksi kuvataan lyhyesti kunkin maan varhaiskasvatusta, jonka jälkeen esitetään tiivistelmä kyseisen maan varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimuksesta. Lopuksi vertaillaan johtajuustutkimuksia ja tarkastellaan niiden metodologisia valintoja ja yhteiskunnallisia ja koulutusjärjestelmään liittyviä taustatekijöitä sekä tutkimuksen antia varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuuden kehittämiseen. Yhteistä tutkimukseen osallistuvissa maissa näyttää olevan varhaiskasvatukseen suuntautuvan kiinnostuksen kasvu ja sen vaikutuksen tunnustaminen. Suomessa ja Yhdysvalloissa on varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimusta tehty runsaasti, mutta Saksassa, Singaporessa, Etelä-Afrikassa ja Japanissa aihealueen tutkimus on vasta hiljattain noussut esille. Vaikka tutkimusmetodologiassa ja johtamisen lähtökohdissa esiintyy maiden välillä eroja, laadukas varhaiskasvatus nähdään aina johtamisen päätavoitteena.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, early childhood education (ECE) is the subject of many reforms in national contexts. The importance of ECE for societies' future has been noted in many ways and developments at the administrative, legislative and practical levels have been launched. Leadership is argued to be one of the key factors for the quality of ECE.

This review has been conducted in "Discourses of leadership in the diverse field of early childhood education", an international ECE leadership research project with participants from Finland, Germany, Japan, Singapore, South Africa and the United States. The objective of the project is to investigate through focus group interviews the perspectives on ECE leadership of ECE directors and teachers. The purpose is to provide an understanding of the various discourses and the range of expectations of ECE leadership. Through discursive analysis, it is pos-

sible to provide understanding and to bring clarity to the essence of leadership. The aim is to increase pedagogical quality, work well-being and children's and parents' satisfaction with ECE through clarifying the possibilities and limitations of leadership. As McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) emphasized, a redefinition of leadership is needed. Having a shared vision and common understanding are the basis of distributed leadership (Kocolowski, 2010).

A short introduction of the countries participating in early childhood education and the ECE leadership research is presented, followed by a comparative consideration of ECE and leadership research in these countries. As is customary of meta-level inquiries of this kind (see e.g. Bolden, 2011; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013; Matusov, von Duyke & Kayumova, 2015), no research method *per se* was used. Rather, after the passages for each country had been completed, these were carefully read and re-read to see "what patterns emerged in us", as Matusov et al. (2015, p. 425) so aptly phrased the idea. Of special interest in our analysis were emerging differences and similarities that could be expressed in terms of broader theoretical and methodological questions.

2. Finland – ECE transformation and research into contextual leadership

ECE in Finland is currently undergoing a major transformation at a number of levels. The most significant of these is new legislation (2015) which defined ECE as an educational institution, governed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, 36/1973). This is a major shift from the previous legislation (1973), in which ECE was perceived as a social service and governed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. However, the shift from a care-oriented paradigm into an education-oriented paradigm is not reflected in the regulations regarding the adult-child ratio and group size, which were increased in the legislation reform. The adult-child ratio is 1:4 for under 3-year-olds, 1:8 for 3–5-year-olds and, in compulsory pre-school, 1:13 for 6-year-olds, with the maximum group size being 3 adults and the corresponding number of children (239/1973). A second major transformation concerns the provider of ECE services. The law (36/1973) defines the provision of ECE as a responsibility of municipalities, yet it is up to the municipality to decide whether they run the service themselves or buy it from an outside public or private provider. Recently, the number of privately run ECE centres has been increasing (Karila, Kosonen & Järvenkallas, 2017). Third, in the second stage of legislation reform, major changes especially to qualification of ECE professionals took place. The new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018) took effect in September 2018. While in the previous legislation (1973) one third of staff was required to have a tertiary bachelor level education with the rest qual-

ifying as nurses through secondary vocational education, in the new legislation at least two thirds of staff in ECE should have a tertiary education. Together with the new requirement of a master's degree for leaders of ECE centers this amounts to a major shift upwards in the level of qualifying education. It remains to be seen how these changes affect the future of ECE in Finland.

The first wave of Finnish ECE leadership research was published at the turn of the millennium, using the framework of contextual leadership theory. According to Hujala (1998), contextual leadership theory investigates leadership as a socially constructed, situational and interpretive phenomenon. This early research (Hujala et al., 1998; Nivala, 1999; Hujala, 2002; 2004) focused on the roles and responsibilities as well as positions and the "nature" or significance of leadership. The findings showed that ECE leadership was a multi-dimensional phenomenon, with various administrative and educational foci. Nivala (1999) in particular points out that ECE leadership needs to cope with the pressure between a pedagogy-oriented interest in substance and a care-oriented interest in administration and social service.

These early studies and results have shaped subsequent ECE leadership research in Finland by showing the importance of contextual factors in constructing leadership and the role played by the core function of an institution in defining leadership tasks (see Nivala, 1999). For the most part, research conducted in the latter half of the first decade and first half of the second decade of the 21st century has focused on the effects of distributed leadership and organisation models, which are typical in Finnish ECE institutions, and on issues relating to how the core function of an ECE institution defines leadership tasks for centre directors and teachers, as well as macro level managers.

Contextual aspects were brought to the fore in the first of a new wave of leadership research in 2009 as Halttunen conducted her doctoral thesis on leadership in distributed organisations where a single director leads at least 2 ECE centres. Building on this, Soukainen (2015) found, rather surprisingly, that staff working in a physically different location from their supervisor felt that they received more pedagogical support than staff working in the same location as their supervisor. Several studies have also examined macro level contextual factors. Akselin (2013) conducted a narrative study on how strategic leadership abilities develop during a person's career path. Her results also showed the need for an understanding of the core function on the administrative level. A similar conclusion was reached by Alila (2013), who analysed administrative documents from 1972 to 2012 in order to ascertain how quality of ECE is construed at the administrative level. Her results show that systematic work is needed so that a unified and comprehensive understanding of quality can be achieved to work as a guideline for administrative control of ECE.

There have also been studies that focus on the core function of ECE institutions as a key factor for leadership. Fonsén's dissertation research (2014; see also Fonsén, 2013) used a narrative methodology to examine the concept of pedagogical leadership in terms of how it is understood and implemented and in terms of the challenges it faces. The results showed that knowledge of what good quality pedagogy entails and how it is implemented in practice are central to pedagogical leadership but need to be complemented by human management skills and an ability to argue for pedagogy in order to achieve success in the varying contexts. Heikka (2014), on the other hand, compared the perceptions of pedagogical leadership of different stakeholders in municipal administration of ECE, thus merging the perspectives of contextuality and core function in leadership research. This study showed that macro level stakeholders were not sufficiently well acquainted with the daily practices of ECE centres to establish efficient strategies for pedagogical improvement.

Issues concerning the core function of ECE institutions have gained added importance as a research aim because of the gradual transfer of ECE services in Finland from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social affairs and Health to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture. In line with this development, Halttunen and Heikka continue their ECE leadership studies with the topical phenomenon of teacher leadership (Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2016) while Fonsén and Akselin (later Keski-Rauska) are conducting a case study of joint ECE leadership in the city of Hämeenlinna. (Fonsén, Akselin & Aronen, 2015; Keski-Rauska, Fonsén, Aronen, & Riekkola, 2016; Fonsén & Keski-Rauska, 2018, Fonsén & Mäntyjärvi, forthcoming). In addition, Soukainen and Fonsén (2018) have recently studied sustainable leadership in ECE.

3. Germany – diversity of ECE and leadership research for quality

Today's ECE system in Germany developed from two different societal systems that existed before the uniting of the former east and west in 1989. While in western Germany ECE was organised by non-profit organisations according to the social civic code VIII (SGB VIII), in East Germany, ECE was organised by the state as part of the health system for crèches and of the educational system for the kindergarten. In West Germany, most of the ECE providers were free social non-profit enterprises, initiatives of the churches or parents, but also municipalities under conditions of subsidiarity (Merchel, 2008). A variety of pedagogical perspectives was implemented as opposed to in East Germany, where one central curriculum, regulated by the state, was in use. In West Germany, most of the children aged under 3 years were educated in the family or in private home-based ECE settings, while in East Germany, it was normal for children from the age of

1 year to be educated in a ECE centre. Nowadays, a majority of the more than 55,000 ECE centres are run by non-profit organisations while municipalities and private profit organisations run 31% and 3% of the centres, (Destatis, 2017). ECE provision varies a lot in size, structure and management. Centres care for 10 or up to 300 children and the organisations employ from 2 or 3 up to more than 5,000 people to work in the centres or administration. Many non-profit organisations are managed by volunteers, although some of them employ professional managers.

Studies revealed non-optimal pedagogical quality in German ECE centres (Tietze, 1998; Tietze et al., 2013). Since the German “PISA shock” at the beginning of the century (Germany was only in the middle range), major reforms were initiated in the German ECE system. Since 2013, parents have been guaranteed to get a place in a ECE centre for their children starting from the age of 1 year. Consequently, nowadays ca. 3.5 million children are educated by nearly 700,000 pedagogues in the ECE centres (Destatis, 2017; Autorengruppe Fachkräftebarometer 2017). Staff members have to be qualified in (non-academic) professional education which is recognised by the state. Since 2005, bachelor programs for ECE (“Kindheitspädagogik”) came into being at many universities of applied sciences.

Educational programmes, laws and financing are regulated by the 16 states of the federation. Therefore, the conditions for the children to receive education and their opportunities for learning and support as well as the working conditions for the staff in the centres vary a lot. For example, child-staff ratios, qualification requirements for leaders and financing systems are different in the different states. In some states, ECE is free, but in others, parents have to pay large amounts of money for the institutional ECE of the child. This variety of regulations and practices is a defining feature of ECE in Germany at the moment.

There has been little research on leadership in ECE to date, with educational research having focused on later stages of the system of education until recently. However, three directions of research stand out. First, in the course of efforts to improve quality and to standardise the structural conditions of ECE, a number of expert papers were written to define the necessary equipment for pedagogues and leaders to achieve good quality in the ECE centres. For example, on the basis of a literature review, work analysis, diaries and interviews, Strehmel (2016) developed a task profile for leaders in ECE, criteria for their qualification and a formula to calculate time resources necessary for the leaders, depending on the size, structure and pedagogical challenges in a specific ECE centre.

A second research direction has been descriptive studies of leaders’ work. Working conditions, the time for leadership tasks and necessary qualifications vary between states and this was put down to a lack of knowledge of leadership tasks (Behr & Lange, 2014). Fthenakis, Hanssen, Oberhuemer & Schreyer,

(2003) conducted a survey on the tasks of managers in ECE and revealed ten dimensions of tasks, e.g. the development of a conceptual framework, organisation and service development, human resource management, cooperation with parents and social services, financing, administration, and room management. Recent studies on working conditions, work satisfaction and health of educators and leaders in ECE revealed a level of high job satisfaction, but at the same time, higher levels of stress than in other professions. In addition, four out of five leaders suffered from a “gratification crisis”, which means an imbalance between the job involvement and work engagement on the one hand, and the (not only monetary) appreciation and gratification of their work by parents, managers and the society on the other hand. (Schreyer, Krause, Brandl, & Nicko, 2014; Viernickel, Voss & Mauz, 2017.) Münchow and Strehmel (2016) conducted a survey with 141 Berlin centre leaders on the time used for undertaking different leadership tasks (under conditions of limited time resources) and found that most of the time was used for management, administration, team leadership and cooperation ($m = 9\text{h}$ per week), followed by human resource management, pedagogical organisation and concept work ($m = \text{ca. } 7.5\text{h}$ each). Many leaders pointed out not having enough time for organisational and quality development, networking and self-management.

Thirdly, a few studies have focused on different leadership styles. Nentwig-Gesemann, Nicolai, & Köhler (2016) described the tasks and daily challenges of ECE leaders in a qualitative study with 10–12 leaders from each of the 16 German states. The authors identified three leadership styles dependent on their focus on management and organisation, care for the staff or team leadership. In contrast, Strehmel and Overmann (2018) found that although being dependent on the size, values and philosophy of the different organisations, the majority of leaders interviewed across different organisations performed according to an employee-oriented leadership style striving for commitment and professional development of their collaborators. Viernickel et al. (2013) investigated the conditions of good pedagogical quality and described styles of team leadership to cope with pedagogical goals given by governmental ECE programs under conditions of narrow child-staff ratios. The results show that teams which developed their own pedagogical concepts in a participatory way and adapted them to the official program of their state managed better than teams that tried merely to transfer the contents of the state program into practice.

4. Japan – aspiration to harmonize ECE systems

In Japan, two main kinds of institutions are involved on ECE: kindergarten (4 hours per day in principle) and day nursery (8 hours in principle). Historically, kindergartens and day nurseries have existed under separate systems in the ed-

ucation and welfare sectors. Recently, to meet the growing needs of ECE, both sectors have collaborated in the establishment of a new unified system. Thus, currently there are three systems in the field of ECE. Between the two traditional institutions, there has been a long debate regarding the interpretation and positionings of the terms “*Hoiku*”, meaning both education and care, and “*Kyoiku*”, meaning education. Historically, “*Kyoiku*” has been used in connection with kindergartens to position them within the school system, while for day nurseries “*Hoiku*” has been used to define a different status and function – one integrating care and education (Yukawa, 2016). Although there are presently two administrations in ECE settings, the term “*Hoiku*” is used in both areas (Yukawa, 2016) and is more popular in the ECE field. In 2017, curriculum guidelines for ECE have been revised and improved in terms of consistency of policy. All 3-5-year-old children should participate in ECE of the same quality. Despite historical conflict and three systems of governance in the ECE setting in Japan, the starting point for supporting children’s growth in the future is a promising one (Tamiaki et al., 2017).

Recently, research on ECE leadership in Japan has been connected with the idea of quality. Conventionally, retired principals of elementary schools or junior high schools take up positions at kindergartens. Likewise, in nurseries, it is not necessary for the principal to have competence in ECE. To change this, the government has demanded research on, and consequently the implementation of, a future vision of ECE leadership (CEDEP, 2016; Akita, Yodogawa, Sagawa, & Suzuki, 2017). Though there have been several publications of directions for implementing leadership in ECE (e.g. Kobayashi et al., 2009; Imai, 2016; Yato, 2017), and from 2018, on-the-job -training will be conducted by the government for leaders all over the country (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2016), academic research in the field is still in its infancy.

The research on leadership has so far focused on two themes. The first of these is the relationship between leadership and staff improvement. Ueda (2004) interviewed five practitioners who had been transferred from one job to another about their views of the past and present supervisor. The findings indicate that personal competencies are affected by the leaders that practitioners work with. Following this, Uzuhashi (2009) analysed the relationship between staff motivation and leadership by sending a questionnaire to 3,000 practitioners. The results showed that practitioners were motivated by leaders’ preferences for performance, support for staff, and responses to parents and policy. Ueda (2014) has revealed an essential leadership factor in “building a learning community and team culture”, and also, that leaders placed emphasis on self-improvement through in-service training (Ueda, 2015). This indicates that leadership which promotes a collaborative work culture by facilitating frequent discussion is effective for training.

The second theme of research is leadership tasks. Ito (2002) interviewed ten leaders and revealed their role as both managers and holders of exclusive knowledge in ECE. This double role was confirmed by Hujala et al. (2016) in a cross-cultural study between Finland, Japan and Singapore. Japanese leaders spent most of their time on service management, human resource management, and daily managerial tasks, whereas pedagogical leadership remained in the background. The discussion about leadership in ECE overlaps with society in general. For example, as a part of studying recent societal reforms in Japan regarding taxation and decentralization of regulation, Ito (2014) revealed the role of leadership and current issues in heads and cadres of municipal government in the ECE sector. According to the research, heads recognize that they influence municipal ECE, for example by selecting the best measures among several options, policy formulation and implementation of the measures.

5. Singapore – National investment and governance

Since 2013, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), jointly overseen by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social and Family Development, has served as the regulatory and developmental authority for ECE in Singapore. The ECE industry can be described as a largely private sector, comprised of for-profit and non-profit centres. There are currently about 450 private kindergartens, 1,400 childcare centres and 15 government kindergartens (ECDA, 2017a). The industry faces various challenges (see Masood, 2017), which have led the government to prioritise the progressive development of the sector by doubling its recent expenditure on early childhood education to S\$1.7 billion by 2022 (Goy, 2017).

During the last decade, efforts in the sector have focused on improving outcomes for children, affordability and accessibility, teacher quality and status as well as regulatory framework and accreditation (Lim, 2017). ECDA has established recommendations to support the delivery of a quality curricula (Ministry of Education, 2013; ECDA, 2017b), an assessment framework for certification for quality assurance (ECDA, 2017c) and affordability schemes (ECDA, 2017d). There has also been an emphasis on providing a systematic and upstream support for low-income and vulnerable children through the KidSTART program. It is expected that by 2023, two-thirds of the early childhood education industry will be controlled by the government (Chua, 2017).

To meet the challenges of the growing sector, new legislation was introduced in the form of the Early Childhood Development Centre Act in 2017, which gives the authorities stronger control over centres (Singapore Statutes Online, 2017). Labour force issues have also been addressed through the creation of career progression pathways, professional development programs and competency

frameworks (see ECDA, 2017e; Skillsfuture, 2017). In 2019, a National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC) will be established through the amalgamation of four existing training institutions, to strengthen teacher education and research (Ministry of Education, 2017).

With a national effort to improve accessibility, affordability and quality of the preschool sector, there is a realisation that effective leadership will be critical to the achievement of those goals. The current literature on ECE leadership in Singapore includes a limited number of independent reports, journal articles based on small scale studies and several unpublished theses. Although this does not qualify as extensive academic research, it highlights the scope of leadership-related issues relevant to the local context.

Ang's (2012b; see also Ang 2012a) report *Vital Voices for Vital Years* provides an insight into 27 leaders' perspectives about the challenges faced within the Singapore ECE landscape. Conducted as a focus group study, the report was written as a critical independent study of the sector. The final chapter highlights the importance of political leadership as an essential ingredient for effective change within the sector. It also recognises the multi-faceted role of leaders and the need to have a well-developed training system to enable leaders to translate policy into quality practice.

Following this, Ebbeck, Saidon, Soh, & Goh, (2014) conducted a small-scale action research project study on 64 practicing teachers to explore how ECE teachers would be ready to take on a leadership role. Adopting the Trait theory (Johns & Moser, 2001) and Situational leadership theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) as a theoretical framework, an online survey was conducted followed by a focus group discussion. Respondents highlighted the lack of experience, mentoring and preference for teaching as push factors for leadership. On the other hand, positive responses to leadership roles were reported to have been influenced by prior experience in ECE or other fields, a belief in their leadership competencies and the view that leadership was an element of career progression.

In 2016, a cross-cultural research study was conducted by researchers in Finland, Japan and Singapore to examine and compare leadership tasks in each country (Hujala et al., 2016). Building on Finnish leadership research and using contextuality as a theoretical framework, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered. In the Singapore segment, 100 program principals and supervisors in Singapore participated in the survey in which the results were examined using Hofstede's concept of four cultural dimensions. The findings revealed that pedagogical leadership and service management were the two highest tasks of Singaporean ECE leaders.

In addition to these published studies, a number of doctoral theses on ECE leadership have been completed in local and foreign universities. Teo (2016) explored the extent to which principals in Singapore believed in the relation-

ship between leadership training and quality ECE provision. She identified both quality and leadership dimensions as important in quality ECE provision. In addition, the research showed the challenges posed by the Singapore preschool accreditation framework and inconsistencies in the leadership training experience. Wu's (2017) doctoral dissertation presented an interpretivist case study on pedagogical leadership and showed how an effective leader advances program and centre quality. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the research showed the influence of macro and micro factors which affect pedagogical leadership. At the exosystem level this was observed in the need for the centre's compliance to national policies and frameworks whilst at the mesosystem level this was evident in the collaboration with family and community to enhance learning and development. Perisamy's thesis (2017) focused on strategic leadership of 6 case sites in their response to the Quality Rating Scale for pre-schools. The study found that transformational dimensions of leadership were closely linked to strategic leadership. The findings also suggested that, in shaping strategies, leaders in decentralised settings were influenced by environmental conditions that affected the management of each centre, whereas those from centralised settings were influenced by decisions from senior management.

6. South Africa – searching leadership competence for ECE

In South Africa, the term 'early childhood development' is commonly used to refer to the procedures under which children from birth to nine grow and flourish emotionally, morally, socially, physically and spiritually (Department of Education, 2001). In South Africa, ECE is a priority that is being supported by legislation, national policies and strategies. Three government departments lead the ECE sector: the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Department of Social Development. They are responsible for monitoring and supporting compliance with Health, Curriculum and Social issues respectively. ECE in the country can be divided into three categories. The community centres (independent, municipality and non-governmental organisations) which cater for children from birth to 4 years, the school-based centres (public schools) catering for pre- Grade R (5-year-old) and Grade R (6-year-old) learners and the Grade 1 to 3 (7–9-year-old) learners in the Foundation Phase. This discussion focuses on the ECE sector accommodating children from birth to Grade R, which is in line with how ECE is understood internationally. At the school level, the governing bodies are responsible for governance and employment issues for ECE teachers. The learner teacher ratio is defined as two teachers per group, with the group size steadily increasing from six for infants (birth to 15 months) to 20–24 for kindergarteners (6-year-olds). At the school level, the governing bodies are responsible for governance and employment issues for ECE teachers.

The National Development Agency (2016) emphasises that it is important for the ECE sector to be led by skilled and efficient leaders who understand their roles and responsibilities, that is, leaders who have a thorough knowledge of ECE practice. The majority of ECE leaders (South Africa) still seem to be lacking in skills and knowledge of leading the ECE centres because of their lack of professional training (see e.g. Atmore, 2013). Also, the research on ECE leadership in South Africa does not yet reflect the importance given to the topic in policy documents. There have been several empirical studies on ECE in South Africa, but few studies have focused specifically in leadership. However, some studies do hint about aspects of leadership.

Atmore (2013) found that, for community-based ECE centres, proper administrative and management systems are lacking. This is in line with the finding that managers' lack of skills can be an obstacle in implementing innovative practices in ECE centres (Fourie & Une, 2016). Muswala (2014), in turn, revealed that ECE principals are faced with a number of challenges such as burglary and poor communication coupled with inadequate subsidies often paid late by the Department of Social Development, poor salaries and infrastructure, lack of fundraising skills and trained teachers as well as inadequate funds, food, educational equipment, blankets and mattresses for children. Furthermore, Modise's (2017) results show that supervision of grade R practitioners by school management teams and heads of department was not regularly and effectively carried out because of their lack of skills, Grade R knowledge, and practices.

Despite these difficulties, school governing bodies and principals play a critical role in the effectiveness of ECE centres. The roles for the governing bodies were specified as governance, accountability, ensuring financial stability, decision making and administration, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and conflict resolution. Even though practitioners are key figures in constructing a creative environment, they do need support from their managers. According to Atmore (2013) and Fourie (2013), there is a shortage of well-trained teachers for early childhood development in South Africa. Kadji-Beltran, Zachariou and Stevenson (2013) indicate that leadership indirectly affects learners' outcomes through creating the cultural and structural conditions for meaningful and effective teaching and learning to take place.

The research presented here certainly supports the National Development Agency's (2016) notion that the ECE field should be served by competent and knowledgeable people, and that ECE services necessitate strong leaders who understand their roles and responsibilities in such a way that they are able to offer supportive teaching, learning and care. However, further research is called for to address the various practical and theoretical challenges. This is suggested also by Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow (2007) who argue that, since the context of ECE leadership is continually changing, a relook into the field of ECE leadership

is in order, especially in the previously disadvantaged communities and public schools.

7. The United States – view from hierarchy towards educational leadership

Traditionally, ECE in the USA is considered to be the responsibility of families; therefore, ECE is not part of public education. Recently, however, the growing awareness of the benefits of high quality ECE (see e.g. Schweinhart et al., 2005; Campbell et al., 2008) has been generating more political support for the increased funding of ECE (Barnett et al., 2008). Several types of institutions provide ECE. When parents are at work, the child from birth to age 3-4 can be enrolled in childcare centres or family childcare centres. In addition, community organisations, parent cooperatives and faith-based groups operate preschools which serve children aged 3-4. Both childcare and preschools are privately funded and subsidised for families at-risk. Public pre-kindergartens and federally funded Head Start programs for families whose income is below the official poverty level (Head Start, n.d.), offer affordable options for ECE. Some states, for example, Florida, offer universal voluntary prekindergarten for all four-year olds regardless of the family income level. At the age of five, children enter kindergarten, which is part of the public education system and free of charge in most states. In general, preschool participation rate is growing; however, the family income level predicts whether a child is enrolled in preschool or not (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). The National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) is the largest national organisation that strives to ensure high quality early childhood programs through determining standards for early learning and education, and standards for professionals as well. For example, to meet the NAEYC accreditation requirements for teacher- child ratio, a 1:8 ratio is required in a classroom of 16 four-year-olds. Furthermore, NAEYC highlights that investment in ECE should be a national priority.

The proper contextualization of educational leadership and consequently, of ECE leadership in the United States, is vital in order to understand its emergent theories and practices. Educational leadership studies in the United States were shaped by leadership approaches proposed in business administration theories, arising out of management studies generated in the late 19th century and early 20th century, by the introduction of new disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and political science (Jacobson & Cypres, 2012). The concept of leadership has been examined mainly in the humanities and social sciences, with diverse theoretical approaches that propose a two-way relationship between a leader and followers to achieve specific goals (Northouse, 2016). According to this approach, schools are described as learning organisations with structures,

hierarchies, culture, power relations, and politics that characterize bureaucratic organisations (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

The traditional corporate views of leadership and those applied in ECE settings are different (Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; Mujis, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs, 2004). Specifically, business-based leadership is focused on hierarchy, large, product-oriented organisations driven by a competitive ethos, and usually led by male figures. On the other hand, leadership in ECE must be adapted to smaller, informal, people-oriented organisations, commonly led by women requiring collaboration and shared leadership (Schein, 1985, 2004). Furthermore, Fullan (2005) asserted that an effective school leader is one whose actions positively affect student achievement. Also, educational organisations must seek a sustainable leadership model which understands and pursues change at every level and works in collaboration to ensure the system quality and long-lasting outcomes (Burns, 2016; Ferdig, 2007; Fullan, 2005). To address the specific characteristics of ECE settings, Abel, Talan, and Masterson (2017) built on an earlier work by Kagan and Bowman (1997) in developing the Whole Leadership conceptual framework, stressing the concept of shared leadership.

Research studies on leadership in ECE in the United States tend to be descriptive (Abel et al., 2017; Fleming & Love, 2003; Jacobson & Cypres, 2012; Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; LaRocco, Sopko, Bruns, & Gupta, 2014; Mujis et al., 2004; Muñoz, Boulton, Johnson, & Unal, 2015). Few studies employed quantitative non-experimental cross-sectional surveys (Bruns et al., 2017; Myers & Palmer, 2015). To examine how childcare centre directors made their centres visible and successful, Myers and Palmer (2015) collected data at 200 university campus-based childcare centres across the country. The findings indicated a need for a more holistic model to describe directors' responsibilities and their activities in promoting greater visibility, integration, and shared knowledge. Furthermore, Muñoz and colleagues (2015) proposed that leadership in ECE must go beyond everyday roles and routines and requires vision, support, and collaboration in the ECE team. In addition, recent research on ECE leadership, (e.g. LaRocco et al., 2014) proposed that ECE leaders need professional development programs with a focus on special education to acquire specific attitudes, skills, and knowledge to deal with their daily tasks. Furthermore, Bruns and colleagues (2017) identified three fundamental competencies for leaders in ECE and early intervention: effective leadership, professional learning, and shared responsibility.

In a study with 12 beginning classroom early childhood teachers, Armstrong, Kinney and Clayton (2009) found that teachers want to expand their leadership potential, despite the limited opportunities. They also pointed out that leadership opportunities emerge from the school's organisational structure and its norms, mainly in the relationship between teachers and principal. Therefore, effective leadership on various levels is key to promoting a supportive

environment for school staff and children's families that will ultimately benefit children's development. A possible future direction is the proposal (Carr, Johnson, & Corkwell, 2009) that the most effective model for early childhood is the principle-centred leadership (n.b. not principal-centred), which is grounded in humanistic, transformational, and value-based attributes (Bennis, 1993).

8. Discussion and Conclusions

The review of research presented above offers a fertile ground for a discussion of similarities and differences between the leadership research conducted in each of the 6 countries. Though a number of themes suggest themselves, we have limited our examination to a few of the more important. Firstly, a clear transnational trend can be seen to be running through the field of ECE in every country. That is, in each of the countries under review, the importance of ECE is being recognised at policy and societal levels. This shows that the importance of the early years is increasingly being recognized across the globe – a development undoubtedly influenced by studies (e.g. Heckman & Masterov, 2007) showing not only the importance, but also the cost-effectiveness of investing in ECE.

Although a similar national effort to improve the ECE sector is present at the policy level in each of the countries, significant differences arise as we move on to the level of research. In Finland and the USA, many studies have already been conducted on leadership in the context of ECE, while interest in the field is just emerging in Germany, South Africa, Singapore and Japan. Consequently, in the USA and Finland, conceptual frameworks have been established to guide research in the respective countries, whereas elsewhere, research does not yet have such a common ethos. Despite these differences, a shared limitation can also be identified. In each of the countries, though to a varying extent, the focus of the research has so far been on qualitative studies focusing on leaders' own understanding of leadership. Although there have been exceptions, a more systematic investigation of the actual practice and effects of leadership is certainly warranted.

Thirdly, interesting differences and similarities can be seen when the research on ECE leadership is put in the context of broader societal and educational perspectives. A particularly fruitful consideration is between the two major curricular traditions identified, for example by Autio (2014): To use the role of the teacher as an example, the Anglo-American approach sees the curriculum as a manual, the purpose of which is to minimize the possibility of error inherent in human action, thus defining the teacher as an optimizer of learning. The North European "bildung" tradition, on the other hand, considers the teacher to be an active agent, an intellectual who is as much responsible for the making of the curriculum as are the national agencies which publish it. (p.19) The role of a leader

can be conceived as being analogous to that of a teacher, and thus these perspectives can also be seen in ECE leadership research. The background in business management, as well as the various studies that connect effective leadership to student outcomes, are examples how the Anglo-American curriculum tradition shows through in leadership research in the USA. As a point of comparison, research in Finland, in which features of both curriculum traditions have guided curriculum development (Autio, 2014), the broader concept of core function has been developed and research has emphasized understanding instead of specific skills or outcomes.

Building on the differences revealed by the perspective of different curriculum traditions, it seems that an interesting interconnection between the different countries' leadership research arises in the concept of quality. Despite the differing understandings of the concept, quality is unanimously seen as an important goal. Furthermore, leadership is considered to be a key factor in ensuring high-quality ECE: quality in its various interpretations seems to play or have played an important role in motivating leadership research in each country. However, this observation points to a surprising follow-up: there does not seem to be a corresponding body of research on the relationship between leadership and quality, with research regarding this key question being limited to individual studies. In particular, it remains an open question whether leadership has an actual effect on quality and whether the different leadership models contribute differently to the quality of ECE. This calls for quantitative research designs capable of establishing cause-effect relationships as well as a more rigorous theoretical investigation of the concept of quality, due to the centrality of the issue.

Finally, in terms of contributions to international leadership research, a number of robust results can be pointed out. First, the research so far has identified the intertwined nature of leadership and institutional practices and structures. This connection is bidirectional in that the institutional context creates parameters for leadership and, in turn, the leader can guide and empower the practitioners by creating institutional practices and structures. Second, ECE leaders' multifaceted role and tasks have been revealed. In particular, the twin roles of managing the everyday functions of ECE centres and having an understanding of the core function of ECE have emerged across the research. Thirdly, the distributive nature of ECE leadership has been highlighted. This can be seen in the various studies, for example in Finland, the USA and Japan, calling for shared leadership and collaboration. In addition, the aim of building a learning community and the theme of teacher leadership point towards sharing the responsibility inherent in leadership. While this third result can be seen as showing a feature of leadership characteristic of ECE, it should be noted that it can also be seen to be part of a larger development in international leadership research, which has brought the concept of distributed leadership to the fore (see Gronn,

2000; Bolden, 2011). Thus, it is presently not entirely clear whether the importance of distributed leadership is something characteristic of ECE institutions and leaders, or merely a reflection of a theoretical fashion of our time. Further research into the issue of quality, outlined above, might shed some light on this question as well.

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